

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 06812 060938Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
HA-05 CU-04 /070 W
-----123938 061305Z /50

R 060858Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1127
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 6812

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SOPN TH
SUBJECT: THAI PRESS: A LITTLE FREER

1. A REPRESENTATIVE OF FORD FOUNDATION HERE HAS COMMENTED TO THE AMBASSADOR ON WHAT HE REGARDS AS THE "FLOWERING" OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN THE THAI PRESS UNDER THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT. WE BELIEVE FORD FOUNDATION REP OVERSTATES THE CASE. SINCE THE COUP OF OCT 20, 1977, THE THAI PRESS HAS GRADUALLY RELAXED THE SELF-CENSORSHIP IT PRACTICED DURING THE THANIN PERIOD AND IS CAUTIOUSLY BEGINNING TO COMMENT ON POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN A MORE CRITICAL VEIN.

2. THE THANIN GOVERNMENT SUBJECTED THE PRESS TO EX POST FACTO CENSORSHIP, CLOSING A TOTAL OF 16 NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES WHICH PRINTED ARTICLES THE GOVERNMENT FOUND UNSATISFACTORY. PUBLISHERS INTERESTED IN STAYING IN BUSINESS QUICKLY LEARNED TO TREAD LIGHTLY IN SOME AREAS, AND NOT AT ALL IN OTHERS.
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 06812 060938Z

3. THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED AN END TO CENSORSHIP, AND THE PRESS HAS MOVED CAUTIOUSLY AWAY FROM SELF-CENSORSHIP. DESCRIBING THIS DEVELOPMENT AS A "FLOWERING" IS PROBABLY AN EXAGGERATION. THE PRESS IS NOW EXAMINING A WIDER RANGE OF SUBJECTS, MANY OF WHICH REFLECT THE INTERESTS OF THE THAI LEFT, SUCH AS THE THAMMASAT 18 TRIAL, OR THE ACTIVITIES

OF THE CPT.

4. THE TONE OF SOME OF THE ARTICLES HAS BEEN MILDLY LEFTIST, THOUGH CRITICAL AUTHORS USUALLY EXEMPT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT FROM FORTHRIGHT SCRUTINY. FOR EXAMPLE, FEB 19 THE SIAM RATH WEEKLY PRINTED AN ARTICLE CONCERNING AMERICAN ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND WHICH REHASHES ALL THE STANDARD LEFTIST CHARGES ABOUT AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN THAILAND. THE AUTHOR'S THEME IS THAT U S MILITARY AID AND COVERT ASSISTANCE SUPPLIED BY THE CIA HAS ENABLED THE THAI MILITARY TO DOMINATE THAI POLITICS. THE AUTHOR ACCUSES THE U S OF CONTINUING TO HELP THE MILITARY GROUP WHICH OVERTHREW THE SENI GOVERNMENT ON OCT 6 , 1976. THE AUTHOR NOTABLY REFRAINS, HOWEVER, FROM CRITICAL COMMENT CONCERNING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

5. THE MARCH 3 EDITION OF TAWAN MAI WEEKLY MAGAZINE INCLUDED AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "WHERE HAVE ALL THE STUDENTS GONE?" THE AUTHOR ALLEGES THAT NEARLY ALL THE STUDENT LEADERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PERIOD FLED TO THE JUNGLE AFTER OCT 6 . HE LAMENTS THE LOSS OF THESE LEADERS, BUT CONCLUDES ON THE HOPEFUL NOTE THAT THE PROMISED ELECTIONS WILL ENCOURAGE THE STUDENTS TO RETURN.

6. IN SHORT, THE PRESS SEEMS TO BE ATTEMPTING TO IDENTIFY THOSE SUBJECTS IT CAN SAFELY COMMENT UPON, BUT HAS NOT YET CONCLUDED THAT THE KRIANGSAK GOVERNMENT IS ONE OF THEM.
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